



U.P. FOOTBALL ALL-STAR GAME



Day 1 of All-Star Week Complete

MARQUETTE, MI – Day 1 of the All-Star week is in the books. What a day! All of the players checked in and each team completed two practices. Both teams got to practice once in the Dome, and for many, it was the first time being in the Dome and playing on the synthetic turf. The coaches talked early and often about making the most of their opportunities and taking advantage of the time here to make new friends. Many examples were shared of past players who still have connections to their all-star teammates from years past.

The players did not have much chance to relax once they checked in. After getting settled into their rooms and having a quick lunch, there was a brief team meeting with all participants. Once the general expectations were given, the group split up and each team began their practices.

Coach Joe Noha of Menominee, who was recently named new head coach to replace the legendary Ken Hofer, brought three of his own staff with him, and will use the week to bond with his own coaches, as well as the All-Star players. Noha is a three-year veteran of the All-Star Game. The East team had a very brief meeting with the players, then got right into practice. They appeared to be working more as a whole group, implementing their offensive and defensive plays as a unit to see how the players reacted to each other in full formations. The coaches regularly met before and after practice to discuss personnel and where players could be moved to best suit their strengths. Noha's Menominee staff include Jamie Schomer (2011 All-Star Coach), Dave Mathieu and Drew Buyarski. The other East staff includes Kevin Hill-Cedarville, Lester Livermore II-Engadine and Bill Harrison-Gwinn.

Coach Doug Hodges of Baraga also had a quick team meeting, then also jumped right into practice. The West team broke up and spent a significant amount of time in individual drills with different groups working on position-specific skills and techniques. The quarterbacks, receivers and backs started to develop some chemistry, and the linemen really began to settle in and work well with each other by the end of the second practice. Putting all the pieces together for some team time paid off as the plays appeared very crisp already. Hodges brought Eric DeMink from his own staff, and the

other West coaches include: Ken Klein of Lake Linden-Hubbell, Kevin Bellefeuille of North Central (2008 All-Star Coach) and Mike Christian of North Dickinson (2011 All-Star Coach).

It is hard to tell at this point which team has an advantage. Both teams are working hard to figure out their personnel and where each player can help the team in the best way. There was a deliberate effort to take less players this year on both All-Star squads, so the players that were selected would get the maximum amount of practice and playing time possible. Being away from football for quite some time might cause conditioning to play a factor, but most of these players are multi-sport athletes and are used to playing the entire game on offense and defense for their own schools, so they will no doubt rise to the occasion. We will have to see how the week progresses, but both teams look to be very focused on their own game plans.

One noticeable difference with both squads this year is the lack of hitting to start the first couple practices. Both head coaches are veteran coaches of the All-Star Game, and have decided to save their players energy and aggression for the opposition on Saturday. There are always a few players who get banged up the first couple days, and it might be a good strategy to focus the players on the mental aspects of the game, and “unleash” them at the game. There was definitely contact and hitting, which allowed the players to prove themselves against their rivals (now teammates), but most of it occurred in controlled individual drills.

Other All-Star Updates: The food drive performed Monday for the Beacon House food pantry was able to take in over 500 pounds of donated food, which is greatly appreciated by their staff and residents.

Econo Foods and Super One groceries also donated power bars, sports drinks and snacks for all of the players and coaches, which will be given out as the week progresses. With the players having been away from football for quite some time, they will need the extra nutrition between meals to keep their energy peaking.

Day 2 (Tuesday) will see everyone settle in to a regular routine of two practices, along with Media Day in the evening. Team and individual pictures will be taken and players will be available for interviews to any attending media.

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